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SENSITIVE
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TAGS: PREL MOPS KTIA CB
SUBJECT: CAMBODIA WITHDRAWS TROOPS; STILL WAITS FOR THAI
MOVEMENT ON PREAH VIHEAR

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. NOT FOR DISSEMINATION ON THE
INTERNET.

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) sources confirmed a recent reduction in Cambodian troops from around the disputed Preah Vihear border area, but could not readily give the full scope or extent of those movements. The senior RGC border official assigned to the Preah Vihear dispute noted that Cambodia is "still waiting" for the Thai parliament's approval of already agreed communiquees marking a clear path forward for border negotiations, including joint demining and demarcation, but expressed deep skepticism that the Thai government would act soon. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Following through on a public vow made by Prime Minister Hun Sen on August 22, senior military leaders from the Cambodian and Thai armed forces met on August 24 in Phnom Penh, and declared an end to hostilities on the border. Thai General Songkitti Jaggabatra announced that "the border will not be the cause of any further disputes." Cambodian troops started withdrawing from the Preah Vihear temple area on August 26. Military officials in Phnom Penh could not yet confirm how substantial these withdrawals have been, but field commanders have confirmed the target is a 50 percent reduction in the Cambodian troop presence. Var Kim Hong, Senior Minister and Chairman of the Border Committees, told Pol/Econ Chief that Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Hor Namhong had raised the Preah Vihear border dispute with both Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva (Aug. 4) and Thai Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya (Aug. 5) during participation in the Cambodian-Thailand Joint Policy Commission in Bangkok. Hor Namhong "pushed to have the Thai parliament agree to the communiquees we already negotiated with the Thai," said Var Kim Hong. Commenting that it is already the end of August, he said the RGC was "still waiting."

¶3. (SBU) Confirming the Cambodian troop reductions, Var Kim Hong also noted that Thai soldiers still had not withdrawn from the small pagoda at the base of the Preah Vihear temple and thus agreed-upon joint demining and border demarcation in that area could not commence. Citing a "negative" article in Bangkok's English-language daily "The Nation" on August 27 which took a stand against the Abhisit government settling the Preah Vihear dispute, Var Kim Hong expressed skepticism that the Thai government would honor the agreements made with his Thai counterpart in the bilateral Joint Border Commission. Nonetheless, he said, Cambodia would keep waiting.

¶4. (SBU) Separately, when questioned at the opening ceremony for a Kampong Speu health center refurbished by U.S. Marines, on August 27, the Ambassador noted to the local press that reports of the withdrawal were an encouraging development and a positive sign that showed the border dispute could be solved by peaceful means.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: The Cambodian troop withdrawals from Preah Vihear follow the very positive talks between the Thai and Cambodian commanders in chief in Phnom Penh earlier in the week. If the Thai military responded with troop "re-deployments" to match, including from sensitive areas in the disputed territory which they had not occupied before July 2008, then a first concrete and positive step to resolve this dispute bilaterally will have been completed, providing a good basis for further diplomatic progress.

RODLEY